

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

All the Year Round

A Weekly Journal

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A VALIANT IGNORANCE.

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CHAPTER I.

"MY DEAR MAMMA—I hope you are quite well. I am quite well, and Smut is quite well. Her tail is very fat. I hope papa is quite well. I have a box of soldiers. The captain has a horse. Uncle Richard gave them to me. There is a hole in the horse, and he sticks in tight. Auntie is quite well, and so is nurse, and so is cook.—I am, your loving Son,
"JULIAN."

It was the table d'hôte room of one of the best hotels in Nice; a large room, gay and attractive according to its kind, as fresh paint, bright decoration, and expanse of looking-glass could make it. From end to end were ranged small tables, varying in size but uniform in the radiant spotlessness of their white cloths and the brightness of their silver, china, or glass; and to and fro between the tables, and from the tables to the door, moved active waiters, whose one aim in life seemed to be the anticipation of the wishes of the visitors for whose pleasure alone they apparently existed.

It was early, and déjeuner proper was hardly in full swing as yet. But a good many of the tables were occupied notwithstanding, and a subdued hum of conversation pervaded the air; a hum compounded of the shrill chatter of the inevitable American woman, the quick, eager volubility of French tongues, backed by a less pronounced but perfectly perceptible under-

current of German and English; the whole diversified now and then by a light laugh.

The sounds were subdued because the room was large and sparsely filled, but they were gay. The smiling alacrity of the waiters was apparently at once a symptom of, and a subtle tribute to, the humour of the hour. There were sundry strongly-marked faces here and there among the little groups; middle-aged men to whom neither ambition nor care could have been empty words; middle-aged women with lines about their faces not lightly come by; young girls with the vague desire and unrest of youth; young men with its secrets and its aspirations. But all individuality of care, anxiety, or desire, seemed to be in abeyance for the time being; enjoyment—somewhat conventional, well-dressed enjoyment of the kind that rather covers up trouble as not "the thing" than disperses it—was evidently the order of the day. It was within three days of the carnival, and the visitors who were crowding into Nice came one and all with fixedly and obviously light-hearted intention.

The link between the little letter—not little by any means in a material sense, since its capitals sprawled and staggered over a large sheet of foreign letter paper—and the smart, pleasure-seeking atmosphere of the Nice table d'hôte room, was a woman who sat at a little table by one of the open windows. And she was much more easily to be identified, arguing from her appearance and manner, with her present surrounding than with the images conjured up by the blotted letter in her hand. She was a small woman, with a trim and very erect little figure, the trimness of which was accentuated by the conventional perfection

of the dress she wore ; it was not such a dress as would commend itself to the fashionable woman of to-day — at that date, eighteen hundred and seventy-two, tailor-made garments for ladies were not — but it had won a glance of respect, nevertheless, from every woman in the room in the course of the few minutes which had elapsed since the wearer had entered. Her hair was fair; very plentiful and very fashionably dressed. Her eyes were blue ; her colour pale. If she had had no other claims on a critic's attention, no more marked characteristics, she might have been called rather pretty. She was rather pretty, as a matter of fact, but her prettiness was dwarfed, and put out of sight by the stronger influence of her manner and expression.

As she sat there reading her letter, neither moving nor speaking, she was stamped from head to foot — as far as externals went — as one of a type of women which commands more superficial homage than perhaps any other — the woman of the world. The self-possession, the quiet, unquestioning assurance, even the superficiality of her expression in its total absence of intellectuality or emotionalism, spoke to character ; the narrow character, truly, which is cognisant only of shallow waters ; but which has sounded those waters, knows them, and reigns in them ; and it was a noticeable feature about her that even this character had gone to the accentuation of the type in her. As to her age, it would have been extremely difficult to guess it from her appearance. Her face was quite unworn — evidently such emotions as she had known had gone by no means deep — and yet it was not young ; there was too much knowledge of the world, too much "savoir-faire" about it for youthfulness. As a matter of fact, she was twenty-six years old. She was sitting alone at the little table by the window, and her perfect freedom from nervousness, or even consciousness of the admiring glances cast at her, emphasized her perfect self-possession.

A waiter, smiling and assiduous even beyond the smiling assiduity with which he had waited at other tables, appeared with her breakfast, and as he arranged it on the table, she replaced the blotted letter in its envelope with a certain lingering touch that was apparently quite unconscious, and contrasted rather oddly with her self-possessed face.

The envelope was addressed in a woman's

writing to "Mrs. William Romayne, Hôtel Florian, Nice." It was one of a pile, and she took up the others and looked them through. They all bore the same name.

"There are no letters for Mr. Romayne?" she said to the waiter carelessly.

The voice was rather thin, and as would have been expected from her face, slightly unsympathetic, but it was refined and well modulated. Her French was excellent.

The waiter thus questioned showed a letter — a business-like looking letter in a blue envelope — which he had brought in on his tray, and presented it with a torrent of explanation and apology. It had arrived last night, before the arrival of monsieur and madame, and with unheard-of carelessness, but with quite amazing carelessness, indeed, it had been placed in a private sitting-room ordered by another English monsieur, who had arrived only this morning. By the valet of this English monsieur it had been given to the waiter this moment only ; by the waiter it was now given to madame with ten million desolations that such an accident should have occurred. Monsieur had seemed so anxious for letters on his arrival ! If madame would have the goodness to explain !

Madame stopped the flood of protestations with a little gesture. However it might affect monsieur the accident did not appear to disturb her greatly. Indeed, it was inconceivable that she should be easily ruffled.

"Let Mr. Romayne have the letter at once," she said, "and send him also a cup of coffee and an English newspaper !"

The waiter signified his readiness to do her bidding with the greatest alacrity, took the letter from her with an apologetic bow, laid by her side a newspaper for madame's own reading, as he said, and retired. Left once more alone, madame proceeded to breakfast in a dainty, leisurely fashion, ignoring the newspaper for the present, and drawing from the envelope in which she had replaced the childish little epistle a second letter. It was a long one, and she read it placidly as she went on with her breakfast.

"MY DEAR HERMIA," it ran, "Julian has just accomplished the enclosed with a great deal of pride and excitement. The wild scrawls that occur here and there were the result of imperative demands on his part to be allowed to

write 'all by himself'! The dear pet is very well and grows sweeter every day, I really believe. You were to meet Mr. Romayne, at Mentone, on the second, I think he said, and to go on to Nice the next day, so I hope you will get this soon after you arrive there. I hope the change will do Mr. Romayne good. He came here to see Julian yesterday and I did not think him looking well, nor did father. He only laughed when father told him so. We were so glad to get your last letter. You are not a very good correspondent, are you? But, of course, you were going out a great deal in Paris and had not much time for writing. You seem to have had a delightful time there.

"Denis Falconer came back last week. He has been away nearly a year, you know. He is very brown, and has a long beard, which is rather becoming. The Royal Geographical are beginning to think rather highly of him, father is told, and he will probably get something important to do before long. Father wanted him to come and stay here, but he has gone back to his old chambers. Not very cousinly of him, I think.

"You don't say whether you are coming to London for the season? I asked Mr. Romayne, but he said he did not know what your plans were. I do so hope you will come, though I am afraid I should not be pleased if the spirit should move you to settle down in England and demand Julian! However, I suppose that is not very likely.

"With much love, dear Hermia.—Your very affectionate cousin,
"FRANCES FALCONER."

Mrs. Romayne finished the letter, which she had read with leisurely calm, as though her interest in it was by no means of a thrilling nature, and then opened and glanced through the others which were waiting their turn. They were of various natures; one or two came from villas about Nice, and consisted of more or less pressing invitations; one was from a well-known leader of society in Rome—a long, chatty letter, which the recipient read with evident amusement and interest. There were also one or two bills, at which Mrs. Romayne glanced with the composure of a woman with whom money is plentiful.

Breakfast and correspondence were alike disposed of at last, and by this time the room was nearly full. The laughter and

talk was louder now, the atmosphere of gaiety was more accentuated. Outside in the sunshine in the public gardens a band was playing. Mrs. Romayne was alone, it is true, and her voice consequently added nothing to the pervading note, but her presence, solitary as it was, was no jarring element. She was not lonely; her solitude was evidently an affair of the moment merely; she was absolutely in touch with the spirit of the hour, and no laughing, excited girl there witnessed more eloquently or more unconsciously to the all-pervading dominion of the pleasures of life than did the self-possessed looking little woman, to whom its pleasures were also its businesses—the only businesses she knew.

She had gathered her letters together, and was rising from her seat with a certain amount of indecision in her face, when a waiter entered the room and came up to her. "Some ladies wishing to see madame were in the salon," he said, and he handed her as he spoke a visiting card bearing the name, "Lady Henry Birkett." Underneath the name was written in pencil, "An unconscionable hour to invade you, but we are going this afternoon to La Turbie, and we hope we may perhaps persuade you to join us."

"The ladies are in the salon, you say?" said Mrs. Romayne, glancing up with the careless satisfaction of a woman to whom the turn of events usually does bring satisfaction—perhaps because her demands and her experience are alike of the most superficial description.

"In the salon, madame," returned the waiter. "Three ladies and two gentlemen."

He was conducting her obsequiously across the room as he spoke, and a moment later he opened the door of the salon and stood aside to let her pass in.

A little well-bred clamour ensued upon her entrance; greetings, questions, and answers as between acquaintances who had not met for some time, and met now with a pleasure which seemed rather part and parcel of the gaiety to which the atmosphere of the dining-room had witnessed than an affair of the feelings. All Mrs. Romayne's five visitors were apparently under five-and-thirty, the eldest being a man of perhaps three or four-and-thirty, addressed by Mrs. Romayne as Lord Birkett; the youngest a pretty girl who was introduced by the leader of the party, presumably Lady Birkett, herself quite a young woman, as "my little sister."

They were all well-dressed ; they were all apparently in the best possible spirits, and bent upon enjoyment ; and gay little laughs interspersed the chatter incessantly breaking from one or the other on little or no apparent provocation. Eventually Lady Birkett's voice detached itself and went on alone.

"We heard you were here," she said, "from a man who is staying here. We are at the *Fratcals*, you know. And we said at once, 'Supposing Mrs. Romayne is not engaged for to-morrow'—so many people don't come, you see, until the day before the carnival, and consequently, of course, one has fewer friends and fewer engagements, and this week is not so full, don't you know—'supposing she has no engagement for to-morrow,' we said, 'how pleasant it would be if she would come with us to *La Turbie*.' We have to make Mr. Romayne's acquaintance, you know. So charmed to have the opportunity. I hope he is well ?"

"Fairly well, thanks," replied his wife. "He has been in London all the winter—his business always seems to take him to the wrong place at the wrong time—and either the climate or his work seems to have knocked him up a little. He seems to have got into a shocking habit of sitting up all night and staying in bed all day. At least he has acted on that principle during the week we have been together. He is actually not up yet."

Mrs. Romayne smiled as she spoke ; her husband's "shocking habits" apparently sat very lightly on her ; in fact there was something singularly disengaged and impersonal in her manner of speaking of him altogether. Her visitor received her smile with a pretty little unmeaning laugh, and went on with much superficial eagerness :

"He may, perhaps, be up in time for our expedition though ! We thought of starting in about two hours' time. They say the place is perfectly beautiful at this time of year. Perhaps you know it ?"

"No," returned Mrs. Romayne. "Oddly enough I have never been to Nice before. I have often talked of wintering here, but I have always eventually gone somewhere else. Are you here for the first time ?" she added, turning to the young man, whom she had received as Mr. Allan, and who evidently occupied the position of mutual acquaintance between herself and her other visitors. He was answering her in the affirmative when Lord Birkett struck in with a cheery laugh.

"He's been here two days, and he has come to the conclusion that *Nice* is a beastly hole, Mrs. Romayne !" he said. "This afternoon's expedition is really a device on our part for cheering him up. He let himself be persuaded into putting some money into a new bank, and the new bank has smashed. Have you seen the papers ? Now, Allan hasn't lost much, fortunately ; it isn't that that weighs upon him. But he is oppressed by a sense of his own imbecility, aren't you, old fellow ?"

The young man laughed, freely enough.

"Perhaps I am," he said. "So would you be, Birkett, wouldn't he, Mrs. Romayne ? And don't tell me you wouldn't have done the same, because any fellow would in my place. However, if Mrs. Romayne is more likely to join us this afternoon if the proceedings are presented to her in a charitable light, I'm quite willing to pose as an object for charity. Take pity on me, Mrs. Romayne, do !"

"I shan't pity you," answered Mrs. Romayne lightly. "You don't seem to me to be much depressed, and your misfortunes appear to be of your own making. But I shall be delighted to go with you this afternoon," she continued, turning to Lady Birkett. "And I feel sure that Mr. Romayne will also be delighted."

"That is quite charming of you !" exclaimed Lady Birkett, rising as she spoke. "Well, then, I think if we were to call for you—yes, we will call for you in two hours from now. So glad you can come ! The little boy quite well ? So glad. In two hours, then ! Au revoir."

There was a flutter of departure, a chorus of bright, meaningless, last words, and Mrs. Romayne stood at the head of the great staircase, waving her hand in farewell as her visitors, with a last backward glance and parting smiles and gestures, disappeared from view. She stood a moment watching some people in the hall below, whose appearance had struck her at dinner on the previous evening, and as she looked idly at them she saw a man come in—an Englishman, evidently just off a journey, and "not a gentleman" as she decided absently—and go up to a waiter who was standing in the dining-room doorway. The Englishman evidently asked a question and then another and another, and finally the waiter glanced up the stairs to where Mrs. Romayne stood carelessly watching, and obviously pointed her out to his inter-

locutor, asking a question in his turn. The Englishman, after looking quickly in Mrs. Romayne's direction, shook his head in answer and walked into the dining-room.

With a vague feeling of surprise and curiosity Mrs. Romayne turned and moved away. She retraced her steps, evidently intending to go upstairs, but as she passed the open door of the drawing-room she hesitated; her eyes caught by the bright prospect visible through the open windows which looked out over the public gardens and the blue Mediterranean; her ears caught by the sounds from the band still playing outside. She re-entered the room, crossed to the window and stood there, looking out with inattentive pleasure, the dialogue she had witnessed in the hall quite forgotten as she thought of her own affairs. She thought of the immediate prospects of the next few weeks; wholly satisfactory prospects they were to judge from her expression. She thought of the letters she had received that morning, mentally answering the invitation she had received. She thought of the acquaintances who had just left her, and of the engagement she had made for that afternoon, and then as if the necessity for seeing her husband on the subject had by this means become freshly present to her, she turned away from the window and went out of the room and up the staircase. On her way she chanced to glance down into the hall and noticed the Englishman to whom the waiter had pointed her out, leaning in a reposeful and eminently stationary attitude against the entrance. She would ask who he was, she resolved idly. She went on until she came to a door at the end of a long corridor, outside which stood a dainty little pair of walking shoes and a pair of man's boots. She glanced at them and lifted her eyebrows slightly—a characteristic gesture—and then opened the door.

It led into a little dressing-room, from which another doorway on the left led evidently into a larger room beyond. The glimpse of the latter afforded by the partly open door showed it dim and dark by contrast with the light outside; apparently the blind was but slightly raised. There was no sunshine in the dressing-room, either, though it was light enough; and as Mrs. Romayne went in and shut the door she seemed to pass into a silence that was almost oppressive. The band, the strains of which had reached her at the

very threshold, was not audible in the room; in shutting the door she seemed to shut out all external sounds, and within the room was absolute stillness.

The contrast, however, made no impression whatever upon Mrs. Romayne. She was by no means sensitive, evidently, to such subtle influence. She glanced carelessly through the doorway into the dim vista of the bedroom beyond, and going to the other end of the dressing-room knelt down by a portmanteau, and began to search in it with the uncertainty of a woman whose packing is done for her by a maid. She found what she wanted; sundry dainty adjuncts to out-of-door attire, one of which, a large lace sunshade, required a little attention. She took up an elaborate little case for work implements that lay on the table, and selected a needle and thread, and a thimble, and perhaps the dead silence about her oppressed her a little, unconsciously to herself, for she hummed as she did so a bar or two of the waltz she had shut out as she shut the door. Then with the needle moving deftly to and fro in her white, well-shaped hands, she moved down the dressing-room, and standing in the light for the sake of her work, she spoke through the doorway into the still, dark bedroom.

"The Birketts have been here, William," she said. "The people I met in Rome this winter; I think I told you, didn't I? They wanted us to go to La Turbie with them this afternoon, and I said we would. That is to say, I only answered conditionally for you, of course. Will you go?"

There was no answer, no sound of any kind. Not so much as a stir or a rustle to indicate that the sleep of the man hidden in the dimness beyond—and only sleep surely could account for his silence—was even broken by the words addressed to him. Yet the voice which proceeded from the serene, well-appointed little figure standing in the sombre light of the dressing-room, with its attention more or less given to the trivial work in its hands, was penetrating in its quality, though not loud.

Mrs. Romayne paused a moment, listening. Then, with that expressive movement of her eyebrows, she went back again to the dressing-table she had left, took up a little pair of scissors which were necessary to give the finishing touch to her work, gave that finishing touch with

careless deliberation, studied the effect with satisfaction, and then laid down the sun-shade, and returned to the doorway into the bedroom. She stood on the threshold this time, and the darkness before her and the sombre light behind her seemed to meet upon her figure; the silence and stillness all about her seemed to claim even the space she occupied.

"William!" she said crisply. "William!"

Again there was no answer; no sound or stir of any sort or kind. And for the first time the silence seemed to strike her. She moved quickly forward into the dimness.

"William! Are you asleep—"

Her eyes had fallen on the bed, and she stopped suddenly. For it was empty. She paused an instant, and in that instant the silence seemed to rise and dominate the atmosphere as with a grim and mighty presence, before which everything shallow or superficial sank into insignificance. All that was typical and conventional about the woman standing in the midst of the stillness, arrested by she knew not what, suddenly seemed to stand out jarring and incongruous, as though unreality had been met and touched into self-revelation by a great reality. Then it subsided altogether, and only the simplest elements of womanhood were left—the womanhood common to the peasant and the princess—as the wife took two or three quick steps forward. She turned the corner of the bed that hid the greater part of the room from her, and then staggered back with a sharp cry. At her feet, partly dressed, there lay the figure of the man to whom she had been talking; his right hand, dropped straight by his side, clenched a revolver; his face—a handsome face probably an hour ago—was white and fixed; his eyes were glassy. On the floor beside him lay an open letter—a letter written on blue paper.

William Romayne was asleep indeed. His wife might tear at the bell-rope; the hotel servants might hurry and rush to and fro; even the recently-arrived Englishman might render his assistance. But it was all in vain. William Romayne was beyond their reach.

DIARIES AND DIARISTS.

DIARIES are in a special sense purely a product of civilisation. In the old days, when activity was more prominent than reflection, a man would have been thought a singular eccentric indeed who kept a

personal diary. Even then, however, the chroniclers in a measure played the part of diarists for the nation. There were frequent gaps in their records, even as in personal diaries occasional lapses occur which indicate forgetfulness, indisposition, or absorption in more important matters on the part of the individual. The analogy may be pushed even farther. Just as the ordinary person with a diary often makes extremely trivial and valueless entries in his little book, so the chroniclers had their moments of idiocy or vacuity, and neglected incidents of really national gravity to record this or that piece of ephemeral nonsense of no possible interest to posterity.

Even at the best, one must not pin absolute faith to the contents of the diary. No man is a hero to himself. This unpleasant, or at least enlightening truth drives itself home as soon as the man takes up his pen and looks back upon his life of the day or the week. He may resent the cold-blooded fact. Like as not, then, he tries to deceive himself, or deceives himself unconsciously. Assuming that he has done something notable during the last four-and-twenty hours, which puts money in his pocket, by a sophistical twist he may jot down a few words which make it appear that he is rather a philanthropist than a mere merchant in great deeds. This, of course, is especially so when the individual is famous, and has reason to believe that a crop of biographies will ensue upon his demise. It is so easy to find self-excuses for the little lie. One must consider one's relations, not to speak of one's posthumous reputation, which to some of us seems a mightily valuable thing. And so the man who sets his slave at liberty because he has an incurable disease may readily, from his diary, receive the veneration of his successors for his benevolence.

The average keeper of a diary begins at an early age. Precious indeed are the memoranda of the boy of sixteen or seventeen. Yet more precious are the thoughts of the girl in her teens if she be at all open in her diary confidences, and especially if she be somewhat precocious in mental development.

While I write I have by me half-a-dozen simple pocket-books with an inch or two of space for notes to each day of the year. The books recall my later schooldays and the subsequent year or two. I confess I do not feel much regard for my former self in reading these self-centred and ex-

tremely self-respecting musings and annotations.

How, indeed, should the grown man of the world be edified by thus learning how, at the age of fifteen, he "had a fight with Jones major—and licked him"? As well as I can remember him, Jones major was not a very heroic combatant. For the rest, these records are concerned with walks and birthday presents, cricket-matches, evenings on the water, and occasional dances, which last I seem to have loathed inexpressibly.

Of course, later, the diaries are of a more expansive, perhaps more interesting kind. The fair sex come in for frequent mention. "Walked from church with Mabel" is not a very informing line to the world at large; but as I think of the Mabel with whom I walked from church often and often, I might almost justify myself in falling into a mood of sentimental regret that those days cannot recur. Yet our conversation was never very remarkable.

For my part, I could regret now that I suddenly left off keeping a diary just when men and women and the world itself began really to unfold themselves to me. "Diaries are no use," I have scribbled on December the thirty-first of my last diary, and this lame excuse for my laziness contented me.

Even as a man's letters portray him, supposing he write without restraint, so his diary ought to do the same. Of course, it is possible to write Johnsonian sentences in one's diary, and raise up merely a piece of statuary instead of a human individuality; but the effort of keeping this up is so laborious that few are capable of it.

Take two very typical proofs of this in Marie Bashkirseff and Samuel Pepys. These two individualities have nothing in common except this: that they have in their journals left us their nature embalmed for all time.

When the self-conscious—and almost self-worshipping—Marie writes a sentence like the following, we seem to have her in flesh and blood presentment again before us: "Then suddenly I took a few steps in my room, and began to weep before the glass. A few tears make me look rather beautiful, on the whole."

Poor, vain little puss! There's no knowing if her diary did not largely help to poison and give an unfortunate bias to her nature.

Few diaries contain such pathetic stuff as hers, and yet we see that she

was mortally fond of posing for her own pity.

Take the description of her little love affair with the Cardinal's nephew. She enjoyed very much indeed young Pietro's proofs of his passion, and could write down his voice as "witching," "muffled, and yet so thrilling." Here is the continuation of the interview she describes:

"Then we talked sense, and then he cast himself at my feet, crying in a choked voice that I could not love him as he loved me, it was impossible

"How I love you!" he exclaimed. "How beautiful you are! How happy we shall be!"

"For all reply I took his head in my hands and kissed him on the forehead, on the eyes, and on the hair. I did it more for his sake than for mine."

There was a certain dignity in this episode, but she sadly detracts from it by also recording:

"It amused me to act a scene in a novel, and involuntarily I thought of Dumas."

Could the Cardinal's nephew but have seen into little Marie's diary that night, he would have obtained a vastly more genuine idea of the girl's personality than her pretty figure, her white hands of which she was so proud, and her troubled baby eyes composed for him.

As she grew older, and reached the verge of her brief span of life, her diary intimacies do not weaken, but intensify. She is an arena of baffled hopes, positive despairs, and fears more or less vague and self-created. Such words as the following were for her diary alone:

"As a man I should have conquered Europe. Young girl as I was, I wasted it [her energy] in excesses of language and silly eccentricities. O misery!"

And when she learns that phthisis has laid its hard hand upon her:

"What have I done to God that He should always strike me?"

From Marie Bashkirseff, in her diary, it is a relief to turn to the garrulous, selfish, hale and hearty, and distinctly vulgar and materialistic Samuel Pepys.

Never was man more exactly painted by himself. He was no posturer; nor was he harassed by any scruples or fears that the judgement passed upon him by those who read his diary might not be altogether complimentary.

He was just an ambitious, beef-eating Englishman of the seventeenth century, without the smallest instinct of self-

consciousness, and not at all gifted in psychological analysis. Whatever he writes, he writes plainly, without gloss, whether it relate to his wish to get his sister married, "for she grows old and ugly," or to his own financial position, after counting the gold in his boxes, and reckoning with miserly precision the value of his wife's trinkets and the household furniture.

So far from limiting the scope of his diary to himself, he models it on the chronicles of Sanudo, and those other old Venetians who have left us in their manuscripts so valuable a picture book of mediæval Venice. He has something to say about every one with whom his day's business has brought him into intercourse. When he goes to the theatre and observes my Lady Castlemaine call to one of her women for a little patch off her face, and clap it on her face, he comes home and writes down the incident in his book.

Also, when he attends church on the Sunday after the Great Fire, he does not forget to make a note of the parson's rather exceptional reference to the City as "reduced from a large folio to a decimo-tertio." Small beer, perhaps, these and the thousand other trivialities on his pages; but they are just the minutæ which help to bring us into possible sympathetic touch with the age he lived in.

As yet stronger testimony of the difference between this old Philistine and the subjective Marie, one quotation may be given. It relates to a domestic festival on the fourteenth of August, 1666.

"To Mrs. Mercer's, and there mighty merry, smutting one another with candle grease and soot, till most of us were like devils, and that being done, then we broke up and to my house; and there I made them drink, and upstairs we went, and then fell into dancing (W. Batelier dancing well), and dressing him and I and one Mr. Banister (who with my wife come over also with us) like women; and Mercer put on a suit of Tom's like a boy, and mighty mirth we had, and Mercer danced a jigg; and Nan Wright and my wife and Pegg Pen put on perriwig. Thus we spent till three or four in the morning, mighty merry; and then parted, and to bed."

Here's vitality and vigour and thoroughness, with a vengeance! And the very parentheses and slipshod and bad grammar are but additional bones and blood in the body of the man who has thus so stoutly preserved himself more than a couple of centuries for our edification and amusement.

With the well-to-do but plebeian Samuel Pepys, Esq., another diarist of fame, John Evelyn, may well be coupled. Evelyn's diary is as convincing a photograph of John Evelyn as Pepys's diary of Pepys. It declares him the well-bred, cultured gentleman he was; and is also wonderfully informing about the events of his age.

How, for example, the following few lines transport us in a moment to the evening when they were written, when London was a mass of flames "neere two miles in length and one in breadth!"

"September the third, 1666.

"I had public prayers at home. The fire continuing, after dinner I took coach with my wife and sonn and went to the Bank side in Southwark, where we beheld the dismal spectacle, the whole City in dreadfull flames neare the water side; all the houses from the Bridge, all Thames Street, and upwards towards Cheapside, downe to the Three Cranes, were now consumed: and so returned exceedinge astonisht what would become of the rest."

Nor was Evelyn averse from the most intimate whisperings with his diary, as well as making it a sort of private chronicle of the great events of the day in so far as he himself became acquainted with them. It is pleasant to learn that on the nineteenth of June, 1653, he could write thus: "This day I paid all my debts to a farthing." There is also something serene and satisfying about the following entry of August the twenty-first of the same year: "I heard that good old man, Mr. Higham, the parson of the parish of Wotton, where I was born, and who baptiz'd me, preach after his very plaine way on Luke, comparing this troublesome world to the sea, the ministers to the fishermen, and the saints to the fish."

Mention has been made of the Venetian diarists, among whom Sanudo stands supreme. Here is a fine illustration of the value of diary-keeping. These ancients seem to have lived their lives like their contemporaries, but daily they took up the pen and made an entry for posterity. They are now among the choicest contributors to the history of their respective epochs. The man who designs to form an idea of Venice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries must not neglect their hundreds of volumes, which are ranked—and deservedly—with the archives of the old State in the great library of the Frari.

But for their simple, unvarnished jot-

tings, we should doubt much of the evidence brought by the moderns against their ancestors for their luxury, profligacy, and the life of espionage to which they were subjected. It is only necessary to open their volumes to be convinced. When Sanudo, on October the fifth, 1507, mentions a letter having been posted in the Doge's palace, informing against three patricians, Sonanzo, Erno, and Cappello, for their contempt of the sumptuary laws, and its rejection because it bore no signature, we have valuable corroborative witness at once. And the same may be said of his day's entry of twenty-fifth May, 1509: "Certain young noblemen at the election of the new Abbess of the Convent 'la Celestia,' gave her a banquet, with trumpets and flutes, and danced all through the night with the nuns." Such evidence is worth more than the most eloquent of conjectural sentences against the Doge's city for its dissoluteness.

Upon the whole, the habit of diary-keeping does not deserve to be decried. If the diary be a veracious record of public events, it may at any rate serve as an exercise in prose-writing and précis to the writer. And on the other hand, if the diary be merely parochial, domestic, or even personal in tone, the same may be said of it, with this added qualification, that, at least in the last case, it may act in preserving a human individuality.

Among my papers and books I found the other day an old yellow-brown diary of my great-great-grandmother. Until that moment I had no more idea of the old lady than of Julius Caesar's nurse. But when I read of her journeys to and from Bath, which she much affected, and where she "see a great deal of Company"; of her loss on Thursday, April the second, 1767, of one pound four shillings at cards; her payment on April the second of one shilling and tenpence for "face wires"—whatever they may have been; of eleven shillings on April the thirteenth for "Chare [sedan, no doubt] and Gloves"; and how, on leaving Bath on the eighteenth of April, she gave the maids ten shillings and sixpence, and the bath "servent"—she was evidently a poor hand at spelling, dear old soul!—another half-guinea; then I seem to see her dim shape assume material tone.

For your posterity's sake, therefore, if you think well of your own individuality, and also that you may get a sort of outside view of yourself, you may be counselled to keep a diary; but, for goodness' sake, do

not get hysterical in your confidences with it! If you find yourself anxiously dissecting your own nature—or trying to do so—in its pages, shut it up and have no more to do with it. Man does not live by introspection, but by action.

IN DIFFICULTIES.

WHERE once stood the quiet nooks of Clement's Inn—a refuge from the noise and bustle of the Strand, with associations that took one back to Shakespeare and Justice Shallow, and the midnight chimes of St. Clement's—has now arisen out of a chaos of hoardings and scaffoldings, the handsome façade of the new Bankruptcy Courts. All the more striking for the gloss and newness of the pile are the fragments of the once tortuous labyrinths of the slums of the Strand that are grouped about it. Gloomy archways lead into dubious-looking courts; glimpses of sunshine accentuate the sombre shadows of narrow, grimy streets. But the labyrinth is being pierced in all directions. Down, one after another, come the old houses, narrow and squalid, and yet with traces of former gentility in battered panels and carved balusters. Clare Market, once swarming like an ant-hill and hung with rags and refuse of all kinds, now lies empty and disused, although traces of the market show themselves in lines of costermongers' barrows among the neighbouring streets. Here and there some carved blazonry, some fragment of sculpture recalls the grand mansion and gardens of Hollis and Pelham; of princely Clare; and of that solid, stegacious Duke of Newcastle, who gave his name to the street that was once more picturesque and familiar as Maypole Alley.

Yet even by the usual approach to Bankruptcy Buildings from the solemn respectability of Lincoln's Inn, there are fragments of the older world still surviving, but probably doomed to speedy destruction. The "Old Black Jack," with its sombre brick frontage, came into existence not later than the days of the Merry Monarch, and was a house of call for the jovial players from the Duke's Theatre in Portugal Street, close by, among whom was that famous Joe Miller, whose grave is now covered by King's College Hospital. A later customer was bold Jack Sheppard, and tradition points out the window through which he leaped to escape the officers of the law.

Only a few weeks ago and there was ale still flowing at the "Black Jack," drawers ran to and fro, and the blackened panels were still marked with ale scores; but today the old house is closed, the "Black Jack" is finally drained dry, and only the ghosts of the roysterers blades who once frequented it will be found to bewail its disappearance.

There are fragments, too, here and there, even within sight of Bankruptcy Buildings, dark gables frowning over squalid courts, which even now wear an aspect of almost ferocious gloom, as if blackened with crime and tainted with midnight murders. And yet the neighbourhood, although fertile in sudden frays, and rife with shootings and knifings on occasion, should not be classed as criminal. Costermongers, flower-girls, porters, and others connected with the London markets—classes, like the rest of the world, indifferent honest—form the chief elements of the population. And lawyers with their bags; clerks and messengers; debtors, singing on their way with the light-heartedness of those who have nothing to lose; creditors, weighed down with a load of care, all these thread safely and swiftly the mazes between Drury Lane and Clement's Inn, where once the well-dressed stranger was looked upon as lawful prey. And before many years are over a new boulevard will sweep away all this sordid mass of buildings, and smart shops, huge flats, and nests of offices will replace the fallen rookeries.

But it is not from this side of the town that the main river of traffic sets in for Bankruptcy Buildings. Stand at the Carey Street entrance, looking upon what may be called the back front of the Law Courts, where the judges arrive in their carriages, or perhaps simply strolling along like ordinary men, and, even in full term, where the legal stream sets in with its utmost force, you will find that a goodly portion of that stream runs on to Bankruptcy Buildings. And even in vacation time, when the whole gloomy area of the Courts of Law is almost deserted, the rill of bankruptcy is still running on with little diminished volume.

In comes the flowing tide of men as at the stroke of the clock the Courts open for the day. Lawyers, clients, debtors, creditors, clerks, accountants, all stream in pell-mell—a lively, cheerful, chatty kind of crowd, not at all affected by the somewhat melancholy nature of the business in

which they are concerned. Papers there are in profusion; everybody has a bundle of his own, and bags full of them are squeezed in between the ever-swinging doors.

Once within the swing-doors of the building, the impression of activity is confirmed by the busy hum of voices and clatter of footsteps resounding from one end to the other of the long corridor, which runs from end to end of the building, with one entrance in Carey Street and the other in what was once Clement's Inn. It is the Rialto of bankruptcy, the "Merchants' Walk" of those who deal in "judgements," "summons," and "receiving orders." Impromptu meetings are held in this fine corridor, proposals are discussed, arrangements sometimes made.

For all the world connected with bankruptcy, in fact, this wide echoing corridor affords sufficient accommodation, while the rooms opening out on either hand seem to be excellently adapted for their purposes. Here swarm lawyers' clerks, taking out summonses, filing affidavits, and generally setting the mill of bankruptcy to work. In another room debtors may be at work compiling their schedules, an occupation deemed in all civilised climes the most wretched in which one can be employed. Here are others searching the files, and others perusing the notes of debtors' examinations. Everything is neat and new; there are parquet floors, tessellated pavements, and desks and inkstands of the latest pattern. Old stagers remember stuffy Basinghall Street, and the crowded dens of Portugal Street, and hold up their hands in amazement at all this space and comfort.

While private debtors are dismembered on the ground floor, public companies are dissected above. Broad staircases lead to other corridors above with fine rooms adapted for meetings of all kinds connected with the winding-up of companies, a process which arouses feelings less painful than individual ruin, but which is often still more disastrous in its consequences, in the form of broken-up households and ruined families.

Again we are moving along the Rialto, among the changing crowd, where now appears here and there the gleam of some barrister's wig, as he pushes his way from one Court to another. And now there is the flutter of an usher's gown, as that functionary calls out in an unexpectant way: "Louisa Priggins, Louisa Priggins!" No one answers to that appeal. There are one

or two ladies in the assembly, but their faces betray no evidence that the name is a familiar one. Following the usher into the Court, it may be number one, or two, or three, we find ourselves in the midst of the business that is going on. Everything is neat and plain in the new Court. The Registrar in a bar wig and gown, sits beneath the judicial canopy. There are rows of benches for counsel, for solicitors, for creditors and their representatives, and on either hand of the judge is a little enclosure that may be considered in the light of a witness-box, a prisoner's dock, or a confessional. It is here, anyhow, that the debtor undergoes the "peine forte et dure" of a public examination. Close to the debtor's side is a respectable kind of pew—a churchwarden's pew it may be called, occupied by the official receiver or his deputy—perhaps an amiable and bland-looking official; but depend upon it he has thumbscrews and torturing irons beneath his desk, and the clerks behind him who supply him with sheaves of papers, are so many familiars of the Grand Inquisitor, and help to work the rack on occasion.

But just now the receiver is "mentioning" the case of Louisa Priggins, who has failed to appear for her public examination, and who, it seems, has continually failed to appear, and now his honour the Registrar is appealed to to say what shall be the fate of the unfortunate Louisa. "It will have to be 'sine die'—yes, decidedly 'sine die,'" pronounces the presiding official firmly. The decree has not a formidable sound. "Good your honour, may we all be postponed 'sine die' from such a doleful appearance," might be the petition of a disinterested bystander.

The witness-box is not long empty, for there is a good store of debtors on hand who have to make their appearance, and the new-comer somehow introduces a more cheerful air into the proceedings. There is little to be gleaned in the maze of bills and renewals, and the receiver passing from that part of the question, briskly asks, "How is it that you have so many tailors' bills?" "Weren't they all botherin' me out of my life for me custom?" replies the debtor with a twinkle of the eyes towards the back benches, occupied, perhaps, by a row of the tailors in question, calculated to disarm any injured feelings on their part. "Now, when you borrowed this fifty pounds, did you not know that you were insolvent?"

is the next question. "And how was I to know that?" asks the debtor with an expression of bewildered innocence. "Come," interposes the Registrar mildly, "could you have paid your debts?" "Wasn't that what I was borrowing the money for?" rejoins the witness triumphantly. And the Court gives him up with a smile.

As no hostile creditor appears, there is probably an arrangement in prospect, and the gallant captain goes down, without having ruffled a feather, while the usher smilingly presents him with his "testamur" as having passed the schools of bankruptcy, a paper which he pockets with an air as if it were a patent of nobility.

Then there is a flutter in the legal dove-cote. The Court is suddenly filled; wigs and gowns appear in the barristers' row, and the solicitors' bench is all of a flutter with blue papers. Is all this disturbance about that quiet, depressed-looking man who is perplexedly smoothing the forelock that time has had the complaisance to leave him, and who turns out to be a milk dealer in difficulties arising from his customers running away without paying his score, and from boys running off with the matutinal milk-cans?

No, this is no affair of milk-cans; for here is a learned brother who rises and asks for an adjournment in the case of Croesus and Company, the liabilities being somewhere about a million. "You think it will be as much as a million?" asks the Registrar pleasantly. "Quite that," replies another wig from a different part of the Court, and there is a general wagging of wigs, satisfied at the prospect of being in it, and an excited flutter of papers among the solicitors. For there are still wealthy people among the Croesuses who will see that the last obsequies of the old firm are decently celebrated. And Jack Croesus, who has brought the concern to grief by reckless driving of the Newmarket, Ascot, Goodwood and Company fashion, married a girl with a hundred thousand to her fortune, and a handsome mail phaeton is at this moment waiting for him at the corner of Lincoln's Inn.

And now attention is turned to the milk-dealer, whose affairs do not present much interest except to that bluff, ruddy-looking man in drab coat and gaiters, who is leaning against the seats and makes them crack with his pressure. His thoughts are far away: he sees the early morning sights of the farm, the cows clustered by the gate, the steaming milk-pails. "So

many good barn gallons every morning, so much toil and so much care, and a shilling in the pound for it all!" mutters the stout farmer, who has seen his milk disappear in profitless streams along London streets. "Any creditors present?" is asked. "Yes," cries the farmer, straightening himself out. "I am." "Any questions to ask?" His features work as if he had it in his mind to say a good deal, but after a pause he thumps out a sonorous "no," and the nervous milk-dealer departs with his testamur.

Then the stage is occupied by a lady in deep mourning, one who has evidently long enjoyed the comfort and consideration of one in easy circumstances, and of assured position, an excellent manager, a pleasing hostess, but knowing no more than a child of the tangled affairs from which all her wants had been so long supplied and with such unfailing regularity. And then with a husband's death everything breaks down beneath her, and she is plunged into the cold waters of bankruptcy.

"Yes, they have taken away my furniture—everything—I have nothing!" says the widow with a gesture of despair. "No securities, jewels, bonds, or notes?" She smiles bitterly as she repeats: "I have nothing!" The poor woman is treated with consideration and kindness by the court, but now is the turn of the creditors. It is a necessary thing perhaps to be done, but it is torture nevertheless. For what can be more forlorn and miserable than the position of a debtor under public examination? All the acts of a life may be questioned, all its secrets laid bare; nothing is deemed irrelevant in the case of a debtor, who is protected by no immunities in his avowals. The old laws of bankruptcy were cruel enough. The early Roman law divided the very body of a debtor among his creditors. The ordinances of the Parliament of Paris in the sixteenth century pronounced the pain of death against bankrupts, and that of Lyons condemned them to perpetual imprisonment. But although our present laws are more humane, they still can be made to produce a considerable amount of suffering for unfortunate debtors, without producing much benefit for, perhaps, as unfortunate creditors.

Still again and again the box is filled as the day goes on. Now it is a fashionable lady who brings quite a flutter of French millinery into Court, and

who ascribes her entangled circumstances to losses at Monte Carlo. One gentleman appears accompanied by warders from a convict prison, and there is a call for another who is taking his trial at the Old Bailey. Then there is the fashionable solicitor who has led many clients gaily through the Court, but who now has come himself to the same complexion. Doctors, too, appear in their turn and are themselves sounded and examined by legal stethoscopes. In fine, all trades and all professions yield to the universal law of bankruptcy. There is no antidote against it. Here is one who has spent his days in care and trouble; he has fought a losing fight with adversity, has fought too long in fact, and staved off bankruptcy with too fierce determination, and so committed one of those faults which postpone the debtor's certificate, or perhaps cause him to be adjourned "sine die." Another who has lived gaily and freely on the proceeds of rash and hazardous speculations, now that fortune has deserted him comes to the Court, to free his arms for another dive into the speculative sea.

And of all these here, few will receive that highest honour that the Bankruptcy Court can give, a certificate, that is, that the bankruptcy has been caused by unavoidable loss or misfortune. And without this the bankrupt, even though his liabilities are swept away, may not sit or vote in the House of Lords or Commons, act as Justice of the Peace, Alderman, Councillor, Guardian of the poor, or indeed as local Don of any denomination.

But the Bankruptcy Court is about to close for the day, suitors, debtors, creditors issue forth pell-mell and mingle with the other crowds that pour forth from the other temples of the law, soon to disappear in the greater throng that is whirling through the crowded streets.

PATTY.

A SKETCH.

SHE was a little maid-servant, and she afforded me many opportunities for studying the human mind in its original chaotic condition. It was a problem to me how such an anomaly as Patty could exist in the present day, when education is compulsory, and the Free Education Bill is in force. Patty was unable to write, and her reading powers were limited to distinguishing the letters and easy words.

She had been brought up in an out-of-the-way little village, miles from the school.

She didn't never go in wintertime, and mother wanted her to mind baby in the summer, and when father cum to town to try and get work. Patty declared further she thought she was quite big, though she was only going in eleven, and the School Board man never bothered his 'ed about her.

So Patty went to service to an old woman who had asthma "awful bad, and was that bad-tempered, there was no getting on with her."

Patty had been to various places, and had various experiences before I became acquainted with her. She was fifteen when I knew her, and was developing a taste for dress, and a longing for hats with "big roses in 'em."

She was a very sage person, and her reflections upon mankind were occasionally delightful. One day she remarked with doleful head-shakings that "the world were full of fools; most everybody was fools in these days."

I wished to ascertain by what process of reasoning she had arrived at so sweeping a condemnation of mankind. Therefore I enquired why she considered that the world was full of fools. Patty deliberated and replied slowly that "mother said so."

Patty respected her mother, and looked upon her as an epitome of wisdom and erudition. This worthy woman could read, and "mek figures, and keep father's accounts when he 'ad any to keep."

But Patty looked upon her father as rather a bad specimen in the vast category of fools. I was interested in Patty's father. By trade he was a sawyer, but it appeared that he could only do a particular kind of sawing, and that particular sawing seemed to be going out of fashion, so he seldom had work.

Patty's mother was a good Church-woman, and Patty professed staunch adherence to her mother's religion; but she certainly did not "honour her father," though I ascertained that she knew most of the Commandments except the second and the fourth. "They was too long to learn," she remarked, with evident disapproval of long Commandments.

Patty often went about her work with a gloomy frown, "'Cause father's 'ad no work this week," she would explain, when questioned as to her trouble.

When I suggested that he should try for something else besides his own rarely re-

quired sawing, Patty would shake her head, and reply:

"Nobody 'ud have he; he ain't no good."

I knew that unskilled labour was often needed in a neighbouring biscuit factory, and I remarked that he might find employment at the factory.

Patty sighed dolefully, and said decidedly:

"He don't know no more 'bout biscuits than the dog."

"But he might learn," I persisted.

"He can't learn nothink no more than a Tom-cat," pronounced Patty, and she proceeded to make good her statement by telling me about the time "when father was laid up with rheumatics awful." He came home "froze one night, when he had been sawing five miles off, and he walked through the frost, and his clothes was all froze to him, and 'ad to be took off with hot water to melt them." A district lady called to see him, and presented him with an A B C book, "all with big red letters, as easy as could be, and apples, and bulls, and cats to make it easier."

To wile away his painful hours, his children were to teach him his alphabet. The sequel ought to have been a charming tableau of the thankful man when convalescent reading his Bible; but it wasn't.

"He couldn't learn nothink," went on Patty, "so he sweared, and throwed the book on the fire, after the lady was gone. He 'ud rather 'ad a pipe of baccy," concluded Patty gloomily, shaking her head over her parent's natural depravity of taste.

But this district lady was hopeful, and she made further efforts to amuse the poor man. She brought him some rags, "red rags, and blue 'uns, and grey 'uns, all cut up, and she tried to teach him how to make rag mats."

But he was very hard to amuse this father of Patty's, for "he sweared at the rag mats, and wouldn't make 'em, so me and mother did. He 'ud rather 'ad a pint of beer," finished Patty, sighing over the hopelessness of her father.

The wickedness of the world sometimes troubled Patty. She "can't abide the goings on there is; the world is ever so much wuss this last two or three years than what it used to be." I was curious on the matter, and begged her to explain.

"Folks don't go to church," she grumbled; "they goes after the Salvation Army, and makes mock a-playing musics through the streets."

"But, Patty," I argued, "why should they not? So far as I know, they go about the golden streets and play music in Heaven."

"Then folks should wait till they get there, and play their music here proper on a church organ," she contended, and I was silenced.

Patty's sole idea of righteousness is "good temper." "Folks what is good-tempered will all be angels," she declared.

"What is an angel?" I enquired.

"A woman in a white gown," she answered readily.

"And if I were to put on a white gown," I pursued, bent on acquiring information, "should I be an angel?"

Patty deliberated, and replied:

"Not till you be dead, miss."

"But, Patty," I argued, "are all angels women?"

Patty thought so; she "had never heered tell of men angels." She supposes "men ain't fit to be angels."

Patty has come to the conclusion "as this world ain't worth living in," but she consoles herself with the reflection "that it ain't for long, and as you gets older the time soon slips by."

Patty's philosophy and theology are of a limited description.

"There ain't more than one world; it says so in the Bible. God made one world, and then He put the stars in the sky."

I asked her what the stars were, and she said "little lights as big as a lamp," she should think. The sun and moon were "bigger lights, perhaps as big as a fire."

I asked her where the Bible came from, trying to elicit her knowledge on Jewish history. She answered that she "spected some of them printers a-printed it."

Patty says there is a world above the clouds where it is "light and nice," and we shall go there if we "don't tell lies and that." The other world is "underneath the ground," "long with the devil," and Patty's voice sank to an awful whisper.

Patty has not been confirmed; she sees no good in it. "Them as bees confirmed ain't none better; they swears and tells lies just the same." Patty says she "can keep from a-telling lies and a-thieving without being confirmed."

Patty's political opinions are hazy.

"What is your opinion, Patty, of the present state of Ireland?" I asked her one day when she was amusing herself by spelling through a newspaper.

Patty looked puzzled and replied: "I don't know as I knows him, miss." "Do you know who Mr. Gladstone is?" I asked her once.

"He is one of them men as you talks of," she replied with pride.

Once I read Shakespeare to Patty. It was just before she went to bed. I called her in and read scenes from "Macbeth" and "King John." Patty was fascinated, and regarded Shakespeare's works with admiration, and dusted them with reverence ever after. She informed me one day that she liked "Shakespeare's books."

"What are they about, Patty?" I asked.

"About them burning they eyes out with a hot poker, and put on your nightgown, there is knocking at the gate," she replied quickly, and from this I gathered that the Hubert and Arthur scene and the murder scene in "Macbeth" yet lingered in her memory.

At Christmas time I occasionally read fairy tales to Patty. She had never heard of a fairy; but was quite familiar with the subject of ghosts, and she seemed to think the two terms synonymous.

"Have you ever seen a ghost?" I asked, astonished at her intelligence on the point.

"No, miss; but mother have. It was soon after she were married, when she used to go walks 'long with father."

"Doesn't she go walks with him now?" I enquired.

"No, miss; folks never goes walks as have bin married long. They was going down a lane, and mother sees a woman with a frock on like a servant's—light cotton it was like—but when she come near, she saw it was a ghost."

"How did she know?" I asked.

"It was all a skeleton like," said Patty vaguely; "all ghosts is skeletons."

"And what is a skeleton, Patty?"

"A spirit a-walking," replied Patty. "But mother was so frightened at that ghost that she never walked in the lane again."

"What did your father say?"

"He never seed nothink; but it is all accordin' to the star you was born under; and father wasn't born under stars what sees ghosts, and mother was," concluded Patty as a further proof of her mother's superiority in all things.

I read Hans Andersen's tales to Patty. She did not think much of the "Snow Man"; but the "Red Shoes" and the "Tin Soldier" pleased her. She liked

"Oliver Twist" better than fairy tales, and remarked :

"Them's the things they does to you in the work'us. Mother 'ud never let us go in."

But Patty preferred Shakespeare to all other tales or stories until I bought the Christmas number of "Ally Sloper" and presented it to her. She sat and grinned over it for two hours. She liked "Ally Sloper" "better than anythink," and she thought that the pictures of the man who got drunk and lost his goose were infinitely finer than the story of Hubert and Arthur, or "Macbeth." So Shakespeare was dethroned just when I was deciding that Shakespeare appealed to the most untutored mind. She wanted to know if Ally Sloper were a real man; and I replied that I thought so. She asked if I had ever seen him, and I was able to answer "Yes"; for I saw the whole Sloper family at the Henley Regatta. She sighed, and hoped she should see them some day; and further remarked, "they wus a funny-looking family, and 'ad such big feet," she shouldn't like to clean their boots.

Patty presented her father with the "Sloper Christmas Number," and he sat for hours over it. "He liked it," she said, but he thought the "old man got drunk." I replied that I believed he was not a teetotaler. Evidently the Sloper number did not share the same fate as the A B C book.

It rather troubled me to think that it was impossible to cultivate the taste of the masses for literature when "Slopers" stood in the way. But the masses don't want to be cultivated. They read their "Slopers" and are happy.

Poor Patty! She has left us now, and is thinking of entering into another experience of life. She is engaged to marry a Salvation Army Captain, and she is a most devoted hallelujah lass.

THE NEW POLAR QUEST.

WHY do men desire to reach the North Pole? One reason, of course, is because no man has been there—unless we except the marvellous Captain Hatteras, of Jules Verne's story, and reject the once popular theory that when the Polar apex is reached, it will be found to be occupied by a Scotchman turning a Newcastle grindstone.

Another reason is because great glory

will fall to the lot of him who solves the problem which has baffled centuries of geographers and navigators. And another reason is that the work of exploration must go on so long as there is a corner of the world unexplored, and that the spirit of human enterprise must find exercise somewhere.

But the real reasons are more sober, and in fact are purely scientific. As the two extremities of the globe are two regions which have hitherto remained isolated from science, the more science has advanced elsewhere the more necessary is it to penetrate the mystery of these Polar regions.

We do not want to enter the northern area of ice in order to find a north-west passage to India, as Sir John Franklin hoped, because we know now that such a north-west passage would be useless for modern traffic, even if it existed, while we have much better routes to the east. Nor do we need to go in search of a north-east passage, for Baron Nordenskjold has demonstrated the practicability, if not the desirability—from a commercial point of view—of a voyage by way of the north of Europe and Behring Straits to Japan. Nor is it so necessary to arrive at the actual summit of the mathematical Poles themselves as it once was thought. It is the regions immediately surrounding them—but especially the northern area—in which scientific light will be found, for it is only there that actual observations can be taken on certain points on which depend the answers to many important questions in meteorology, climatology, geology, zoology, and physical geography. The questions of air-currents and ocean-currents, for instance, must remain in a more or less hypothetical stage, until circumpolar observations have been verified.

It would hardly suit the pages of this journal to enter upon a more minute explanation of the practical necessity for Polar research, and all we want to do at the outset is to make it understood that expeditions to the Arctic are not the mere useless and foolhardy enterprises that some people seem to regard them.

The scientific value of the North Pole is, of course, immeasurably superior to that of the South Pole, and Antarctic research may well enough wait upon Arctic achievement. And as regards the North Pole, it may be said that the chief interest

and importance lie not in the mere arrival at the goal, but in the method of getting there and back again, and in the observations by the way.

Dr. Nansen, for instance, does not care a great deal whether he reaches the actual Polar apex or not; what he is bent upon, and is deliberately preparing to sacrifice his life, if need be, in attempting, is to cross the North Polar area in a manner which we propose to explain.

Dr. Fridjof Nansen has already won his spurs in the great battle with the Frost King, and his wonderful journey on snow-shoes across Greenland a few years ago has already given him fame. Yet he is young—hardly more than thirty or thirty-one years of age—a typical Scandinavian, of stalwart frame and fine physique; and he proposes to take the absolute command of a selected body of twelve scientists and sailors in one of the most daring adventures in the history of human effort.

Dr. Nansen proposes to utilise the experience of previous expeditions, from which he derives certain important conclusions. Thus, nearly all the expeditions towards the North Pole have been stopped less by ice than by currents from the north carrying down immense masses, or “flocs.” It is true that Sir George Nares, the leader of the last British expedition, found his advance to the north barred by what appears to be permanent ice—a paleocrytic sea, as it is called—which seems to stop further exploration by way of Smith Sound.

Captain Markham, a member of the same expedition, has declared that it would be highly unwise and imprudent for any commander to risk the safety of his ship in attempting to navigate amongst the enormous ice-floes which Sir George Nares has reported; Lieutenant Peary, of the U. S. Navy, in his recent remarkable overland journey to the north of Greenland, saw what appears to be a stretch of unbroken ice on the waters to the north of that island.

This was last year, and it serves to recall what Captain Markham wrote several years ago about the Smith Sound route—that it has been definitely proved that the land in that direction terminates in about eighty-three degrees north latitude, heading away on either side of this to the south-east and south-west, with nothing apparently to the northward but a boundless and illimitable frozen ocean.

But not a motionless one. The “drift of

the pack” has always been the main obstacle in sledging, after navigation became impossible. Sir Edward Parry’s expedition now seems ancient history, but the incidents of it are recalled by Dr. Nansen’s scheme. After leaving his ship at the north of Spitzbergen, Parry started over the ice towards the Pole with sledges. After superhuman exertions, Parry records at the end of a month’s sledging: “We halted at seven a.m.—twentieth of July, 1827—having by our reckoning accomplished six miles and a half in a N.N.W. direction, the distance traversed being ten miles and a half. It may therefore be imagined how great was our mortification in finding that our latitude, by observation at noon, was only eighty-two degrees thirty-six minutes fifty-two seconds, being less than five miles to the northward of our place at noon on the seventeenth, since which time we had certainly travelled twelve miles in that direction.”

That is to say, the southward drift cut off nearly one half of the northward advance. Later it got worse, for on the twenty-sixth of the same month Parry wrote: “Since our last observation we had lost by drift no less than thirteen miles and a half; for we were now more than three miles to the southward of that observation, though we had certainly travelled between ten and eleven due north in this interval. Thus it appeared that for the last five days we had been struggling against a southerly drift exceeding four miles per day.” When it was found useless to prolong the struggle, and a return journey to the ship was ordered, the party covered in fifteen days, coming south, the distance which had occupied thirty-three days of tremendous toil going north. Such was the difference made by the current.

We might give many instances of the same character from other Polar records, but have selected Parry’s as typical. They establish the indisputable fact of one or more currents constantly flowing out of the Polar area in a southerly direction. The most important of these currents is that which runs southward along the east coast of Greenland, at a considerable speed, and which practically fills up the whole sea-gap between Greenland and Spitzbergen. It is a current of immense volume traversing an ocean-bed of enormous depth, and it is computed that it must bring down from the Polar circle to the Atlantic Ocean from eighty to one hundred and twenty cubic miles of water every day.

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Now this immense outward drain presupposes an equivalent inward drain somewhere. The water does not originate at the Pole, and if it flows out of the Polar basin in one direction to the south, it must flow into it in another direction from the south. This is the conclusion upon which Dr. Nansen bases his plan of action, and his design is thus, in brief, to catch the northward-flowing current and drift with it up into the Polar basin, across the Polar area, and out again with the southward-flowing current.

It seems simple and reasonable, although it is denounced as impracticable by Sir George Nares and other Arctic travellers who have followed other lines of exploration. But what about the northward current? Well, happily, that is not merely hypothetical, however logical, but is a well-ascertained fact—to a certain extent, at any rate. Experience has shown that while vessels caught in the ice on what we may call the Greenland side of the Pole are invariably carried southward, however slowly, the reverse is the case on what we may call the American side of the Pole. Many vessels which have gone whaling to the north of Behring Straits, and have been caught in the ice, have disappeared to the north. To what high latitudes they do drift we know not, for they never return. One branch of the Gulf Stream runs north along the west coast of Spitzbergen, and another branch runs north between Norway and Novaya Zemlya. But the most important current flowing northward into the Polar Sea is that which runs up from Behring Straits.

It is upon the experience of the "Jeannette," in 1879, that Dr. Nansen largely relies. This was the vessel sent out by the American Government under the gallant and ill-fated Lieutenant De Long. Soon after getting through the Straits, the "Jeannette" was caught in the ice at about seventy-one degrees thirty minutes north latitude, and one hundred and seventy-five degrees west longitude. She drifted towards the north and north-west—a somewhat irregular course affected by the winds for some months, and thereafter for several months a steady course to the north-west at the rate of about two miles a day, until, on June thirteenth, 1881, she was crushed in the ice and sank. This was just north of the New Siberia Islands, in latitude seventy-seven degrees fifteen minutes north, and longitude one hundred and fifty-six degrees east. The crew

made for the mainland, but poor De Long and some others succumbed to the hardships of the Siberian tundras.

Now this drift of the "Jeannette" proves clearly a north-west current from the north end of Behring Straits, although only up to the New Siberia Islands. But at the time she sank her progress had increased and was then at the rate of about eight miles a day. Three years after she sank a number of articles belonging to her and her crew were found on an ice-floe near Julianshaab, on the south-east coast of Greenland. There is no doubt about the identity of these relics, but some people doubt whether they drifted, and incline to believe that they were brought by Eskimos from the scene of the wreck of the "Jeannette." Dr. Nansen, however, is convinced that they drifted on the ice-floe, and by the shortest and only possible route, viz., by the north of Franz Josef Land, and, therefore, right across the Polar region. The floe could not have gone any other way without meeting the branch of the Gulf Stream above referred to, in the warm waters of which the ice would have melted in less than three years. Moreover, it is argued that only by the most direct route could the distance have been traversed in the time.

While the voyage of the "Jeannette" and of her relics clearly prove to Dr. Nansen's mind the existence of a current right across the Polar area, he has other and later, and even better evidence; for instance, a harpoon handle was found some years ago near Godhaab, in Greenland, and was sent by Dr. Rink to the museum at Christiania as a curiosity of unexplained origin. It has now been identified with the "throwing sticks," used in northern Alaska and nowhere else, and it is, moreover, ornamented with the Chinese glass beads which the Alaskan Eskimos get from the Asiatic side of Behring Strait. Again, when he was in Greenland, Dr. Nansen collected samples of dust and mud from the ice-floes, the analyses of which, by experts, reveal the presence of mineral matter not to be found in Greenland, and of organic matter which must have come out of the Siberian rivers.

Dr. Nansen, then, proposes to utilise this current—to take a ticket with the ice, as he expresses it—and to float with the floe across the Polar regions from the sea north of Siberia and Behring Straits by the north of Franz Josef Land into

the sea between Spitzbergen and Greenland, returning with the immense southward-setting current which we have described above.

But how will he travel? In a very remarkable vessel, which he has had built specially for the voyage to his own designs.

The "Fram," as she is called—and "fram" means "forward"—is in contour more like a Dutch cheese than an ocean liner. She is the reverse of clipper-built, but is rounded everywhere, of a semi-circular build, almost like a big hollow U. The idea is that instead of being nipped between two ice-floes she will gently slide up on to the top of the ice when the pressure comes on her sides. Her bottom being a rounded flat, so to speak, instead of an ordinary keel, will rest firmly on the ice and will not allow the "Fram" to topple over, as a vessel of ordinary build must when aground. She is built very strong, almost entirely of oak, her sides where pressure may be expected being from thirty to thirty-two inches thick. On the outside of the hull is a coating of "ice-sheathing," viz., a thick layer of American greenheart, a hard wood with an oily, slippery surface. She is one hundred and twenty-five feet long, and will be able to carry about eight hundred tons dead-weight.

This curious vessel is calculated to be just big enough to carry provisions for twelve men for five or six years, and the necessary fuel for her engines, etc. These engines are of one hundred and sixty indicated horse-power, to give her a speed of six knots with a consumption of two and three-quarter tons of coal per day, but she will sail as much as possible in order to economise fuel, and with her sails in a favourable wind is expected to make eight or nine knots.

She is not designed for speed, but for endurance, as after the first few months her movements will not depend on her own powers, but on the currents. She will have enough power, however, with her peculiar shape, to force her way with comparative ease through pack-ice. The fault of most ships hitherto sent into the Arctic is that they have been almost straight-sided, as the result of the precautions taken to secure strength, and thus were readily nipped by the floes and held tight. The "Fram" will be as slippery as an eel among the floes, but as steady as a rock on top of them; and as great length is a

disadvantage in meeting the twisting and turning of the ice, the "Fram" is so proportioned that her breadth is about one-third of her length. She has no sharp edges anywhere, and is pointed and curved at both ends, like the fishing boats with which many of us are familiar—with considerable slope of stem to force the ice under. Internally she is divided into three compartments by water-tight wooden bulkheads, so that if she springs a leak in one she will be kept afloat by the others, while a large centrifugal pump communicates with each of the compartments, and is driven by the engine. For living accommodation she has a general saloon and six cabins, all fitted up in the way usual among vessels voyaging to the Arctic. Her rig is that of a three-masted fore-and-aft schooner, with the sails so arranged that they can be easily handled from the deck—an important matter with a small crew not all of whom are practical seamen. That crew will include a couple of engineers, five or six regular sailors, two or three ice-pilots and experienced harpooners, and the rest scientific men more or less accustomed to a seafaring life, and able to share in the hard work of the expedition.

With this ship Dr. Nansen proposes to leave Norway in June next. He will sail direct to Novaya Zemlya, and make a stop there to revictual and examine the state of the ice. As soon as the ice allows, probably early in July, he will leave for the Kara Sea, and skirting the Siberian coast, and rounding Cape Chelyuskin—the most northerly point of the Old World—will reach the mouth of the Lena River. There he will leave the coast, and taking a northerly course for the New Siberia Islands, will continue to steam north as long as the pack-ice will allow.* As soon as navigation becomes impossible—probably in September next, and some distance to the north of the islands—the ship will be rammed into the ice as far as possible, and brought to rest on the floe.

After that, Nature will have to do the rest, while the gallant band await their fate, and occupy their time in making scientific observations. The progress is expected to be still northwards, but at the

* Since these lines were written, it has been arranged to send a yacht as friendly convoy of the "Fram" as far as the New Siberia Islands. The yacht will carry additional supplies of provisions and fuel, with which to replenish Dr. Nansen's stores before he plunges into the icy circle.

mercy and pleasure of the current, which Dr. Nansen believes will carry the ice-floe, with the ship upon it, right across the Pole and down into the East Greenland Sea, where the warmer waters melting the ice will enable the "Fram" to drop quietly again into her native element. This drift of the ice-raft may probably occupy a period of five years—of absolute isolation from man, out of reach of all succour, and beyond the possibility of retracing their steps. For whether Dr. Nansen be right or wrong in his theory of the continuity of the Polar current, this much is certain, that once the ship is in the drift she will never be able to get back the way she went; once on the ice she must go with the ice.

But supposing the "Fram" does not rise superior to the Ice King, and becomes crushed in spite of all precautions, what then? Why, then Dr. Nansen has other plans. He will have with him two big boats with flat bottoms, decked, and high enough to afford comfortable shelter. He will place these boats side by side on the ice, cover them with thick, warm material taken for the purpose, and coat them with snow. In these boat-houses on the ice-raft he will continue the journey.

Suppose there is not open water round the Pole, but a hitherto unknown land? Then they will endeavour to find some side-current to drift them away again, but, if hopelessly grounded, will abandon ship and boats, and, with light sledges to carry provisions and canvas for boat-making, will tramp over the ice until they reach open water again, make canvas or sealskin boats, and once more launch themselves into the current, which must carry them somewhere.

It appears to us that Dr. Nansen leaves out of account two possibilities—the counter effect of the winds upon the currents, and the existence of a perfect pack of ice round the Pole, under which the currents may course as supposed, but without moving the ice-raft on which the ship is anchored.

Indeed, the whole enterprise is fraught with awful possibilities, for it is without precedent, and is a plunge into the unknown. But Dr. Nansen is not to be deterred by any dangers, and is quite prepared not to come back at all, although he fully expects to be in Norway again within five years after leaving next June. What a tale he will have to tell!

The cost of the expedition is not yet known, but two-thirds of it are undertaken

by King Oscar and the Norwegian Government, while private subscriptions, including one from our Royal Geographical Society, make up the balance.

MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

By ELEANOR C. PRICE.

Author of "Alexia," "Red Towers," "The Little One," etc.

CHAPTER XXXII. AT THE BALL.

THE ball appeared to go off brilliantly. The rooms were large enough not to be crowded, and yet everybody who had been asked came, and Porphyria's idea of bringing together all her neighbours for many miles round was realised. The greatest people in the county were there, who thought it all great fun and enjoyed themselves immensely. There were others, not quite so exalted, who did not approve of Miss Latimer's strange ideas, but yet gave their full value to her large fortune and her fine old house, and agreed that she had a right to do as she pleased. They also prophesied, with admiration of Arthur Nugent's gentle manner and conventionally handsome looks, that he would soon bring his wife into the more beaten paths of society. Then persons of lower rank, arriving rather shy and sensitive, felt their hearts warmed by their hostess's kind and frank reception, by the hospitable light and comfort all around them, the friendliness of an atmosphere which seemed to recognise no differences. Even the stern face of Lucy Thorne, arriving with her brother Frank, who was at first much more subdued than usual, but soon found a girl he admired in his own set, and danced with her happily—even Lucy's face softened by degrees, and quite lost its forbidding expression after a Lancers with Mr. Otto Nugent.

It was later than this, and Otto had again come up to Lucy, who had been specially recommended by Poppy to his kind care, and was talking to her for a minute or two, making her reflect that she had done him injustice, and that he was really much nicer than his brother, when Arthur Nugent waltzed past them with Maggie Farrant, so close as almost to touch them. Maggie looked, as she was, in a state of extraordinary happiness. Her eyes were brilliant; her cheeks, never too red, had just the faint colour which warmed her usual paleness into perfect beauty;

otherwise her skin was almost of the same ivory white as her dress, which was as pretty as that of any more pretentious girl in the room. Many people looked at her and Arthur as they danced. Mrs. Arch was peeping down from the back of the musician-gallery, but nobody thought of her, or heard the remarks she muttered. Poppy, dancing with the most distinguished young man in the county—who admired her and her house so much that he was full of self-reproach, asking himself why the deuce nobody had ever told him about Miss Latimer—pointed out Maggie with a delightful smile to her partner.

"Do you see that girl with black hair, Lord Stanbury? Isn't she lovely?"

"Well—yes, she is," Lord Stanbury confessed, peering through his eyeglass. "Who is she? Never saw her before, I think. Does she live in the county?"

"Oh, yes; she is my nearest neighbour, Miss Farrant. A very great friend of mine."

"Indeed! Yes, very pretty, in that style. Who is she dancing with?"

"Captain Nugent."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Of course. I'm so blind—never know people. I saw them talking on the stairs, half an hour ago—when we came, in fact—and spoke to him. Saw he was with somebody who seemed to belong here, don't you know. But I was looking for you, and I didn't notice her particularly then. Miss—what did you say?"

"Miss Farrant. Yes, she quite belongs to us. She is one of our party; she came alone," said Poppy in her serenest manner.

By this time Lord Stanbury was curious about somebody else, and in politeness to him Poppy had to withdraw her eyes from following Arthur and his partner.

There was nothing for the two to dread in those eyes of hers, if their own consciences did not trouble them. They expressed nothing but admiration, trust, and love. A new and deeper feeling for Maggie had sprung up in Poppy's heart since she had begun to fear that the girl's engagement was a thing to be regretted, not rejoiced in. She had watched for her arrival that evening, had received her with the most marked cordiality and affection, introduced Arthur's friends to her, asked Arthur himself—an unnecessary request—to dance with her; had made it very clear both to the people in the house and to outsiders that this was a guest whom the mistress of Bryans Court delighted to honour.

It was all intoxicating to Maggie. She had never been to such a party before, never danced to such music on such a floor, never seen Bryans Court at its best and most brilliant, with all its fine rooms thrown open and filled with beautifully dressed people. And about it all there was not a shadow of anything to frighten her. She actually did not notice—how could she under Arthur's admiring eyes, and in the sunshine of Poppy's generous kindness?—that Miss Fanny Latimer very nearly turned her back upon her, after giving her the slightest and coldest greeting that manners would allow. She saw Lucy Thorne come in, looking very sulky and dowdy, she thought, and was half ashamed of the consciousness of belonging to her and that ponderous Frank. But Frank did not look so bad in his evening clothes after all, and she carelessly promised him a dance, and won a smile from Lucy in approval of her new frock, and went off to enjoy herself to the height of her untrained youth, quite sure, even before Arthur Nugent told her so, that she was the beauty of the evening, and throwing aside for once, in all these exciting surroundings, even those thoughts of her own falseness which had lately weighed her down. As for Geoffrey, whom she had left in the great arm-chair beside her grandfather's bed, she forgot him altogether.

Otto Nugent had heard Poppy ask Arthur to dance with her friend. He therefore looked after the couple as they glided past with no surprise, but a sort of resigned anxiety which made him pull his small moustache in silence. Then suddenly looking up, he met Lucy Thorne's keen eyes fixed upon him with such an odd expression, that he said to himself: "This good woman knows or suspects something." He felt curious and a little uneasy. "Arthur will be a lucky chap," he thought, "if we steer him through all these rocks safely."

It seemed natural, considering all things, not to let Miss Maggie pass without a remark, and Lucy Thorne evidently expected one. So he said in the quietest tone:

"Your brother Geoffrey is not here to-night!"

"No, and it's a great shame," replied Lucy, with her usual frankness. "He has been left to nurse that old man. I can't quite make out whose fault it is, but they are all selfish together, except Geoffrey."

Maggie Farrant ought to be very much obliged to him. She has never before had such a chance of showing herself off. Miss Latimer spoils her."

"Disappointing for her, though, and for your brother, too."

Lucy laughed.

"Yes; I hope she misses him. I don't know whether he cares much. He didn't want to come. This sort of thing doesn't interest Geoffrey."

"It is a pretty sight, however. Even an artist might condescend," said Otto, still caressing his moustache, and staring down the room after Arthur and Maggie, who had now disappeared. "And you know, Miss Thorne, your future sister-in-law is in herself a very pretty sight."

"Yes, she is a pretty girl, if that's what you mean."

"That is all I mean."

He stood still for a minute, and told himself that, after all, he did not think this good woman knew anything.

The dance was over, people were dispersing and wandering about, distant sounds began to announce supper. Then his wife came by with Captain Lawson.

"Otto, what are you doing? Take somebody down to supper. There, look, there is Lady Jane Fitzhugh at the other end of the room. Where is Arthur? Poppy was asking me just now."

"Am I my brother's keeper? No! At least—yes, much more so than I want to be!" muttered Otto, as he went off to the lady his wife had pointed out to him.

"I saw Arthur just now," Captain Lawson was saying, as he and Alice passed on together. "He was dancing with that awfully pretty girl—I forget what her name is."

"Miss Farrant. Do you admire her so much?"

"Oh, Mrs. Nugent, yes. Most awfully pretty. Such stunning hair and eyes!"

Mrs. Otto Nugent looked frankly contemptuous. She took no trouble to hide this evident feeling, at the risk of being set down, in a man's fashion, as jealous of another woman's superior good looks. She was very angry with her brother-in-law, and out of patience with Poppy and her blind romance. "We shall have a scrimmage before the end of all this," she prophesied to herself. "Arthur is really too bad. Everybody will begin to notice how he runs after that girl."

To Captain Lawson she contented herself with some general remarks on different

kinds of beauty. She declared that a mere pretty face was nothing—worse than nothing—because it simply made a fool of the person who possessed it and of other people too. She talked of race, of breeding, of air, of charm, of distinction, and gave it to be understood that Miss Farrant could not possibly, from the absence of this thing and the other, have any real right to be admired.

Captain Lawson listened and grinned. He was afraid to contradict her, feeling that she was one of those sharp little women who always have the best of it, and that argument might plunge him into confessing tastes which were evidently low. But he secretly resolved that in spite of Mrs. Nugent he would dance with that lovely girl by-and-bye.

So the evening drifted on, and everybody, with a few exceptions, found it delightful. After supper the dancing went on with renewed spirit. Those among Miss Latimer's guests who were naturally most stiff and conventional, most lazy and indifferent, found the brightness and beauty of the whole scene irresistible. The smartest young men, the most modern girls, forgot themselves for once, and were carried away by pure enjoyment as much as their more impressionable elders. There was something in Poppy's dance like an old-fashioned Christmas party of fifty years ago. What this something was, and how it came, would be difficult to tell. It may have been the curiously unmodern ways and disposition of Poppy herself. The spirit of her unconscious simplicity ruled over her house and everybody in it—everybody, that is, who was not too selfish or too preoccupied to feel the happy influence.

But a few people, and those the nearest to Poppy, had anxieties of their own. Mr. Cantillon saw plainly that Miss Fanny Latimer was troubled about something; and it seemed to him that for the first time since their engagement she avoided him a little; at least, she put him off with some foolish answer when he asked in tender confidence whether anything had happened to worry her.

"Oh, yes, Henry!" she said in her quick way. "My gown is ugly—don't you think so? And Arch came and plagued me dreadfully when I wanted to come down early before dinner. It was enough to annoy anybody, I assure you."

"My dear! Your gown ugly! I never saw you look more charming. But that

was unpardonable of Arch. Some of her arrangements wrong? Well, they were soon set right. I never knew anything go off so smoothly."

"So glad you think so. But I must not talk to you now. Something else to do, isn't there? Good-bye."

It was startling to be dismissed so decided. The Rector knew Fanny was right, of course, but he was a little hurt all the same. He sat down in a corner, and watched her black skirts sweeping away.

He did not go much into the ball-room that night. The music pleased him better at a distance; the swimming, circling figures on the shining floor made him feel a little giddy. Like a good many other older people, he moved about and found amusement in the drawing-room, the billiard-room, the library. He talked to everybody he knew, watched the doors in a generally vain hope that Fanny might appear in them, stifled a good many yawns, and once or twice desperately took up a book. Among his thoughts were some that regretted Geoffrey Thorne's absence.

"And I, the parish priest, perfectly useless here—why am I not sitting by that old man's bed, instead of a young fellow who ought to be dancing?"

Then somebody asked him to take some lady in to supper, and he became conscious that there were duties here, even for him. This lady, unknown to him before, thought the Rector of Bryans was the most delightful man she had ever met in her life.

Supper was not long over, and the dancing was just beginning again, when Captain Lawson and Mr. Scott, who were even more intimate with each other than with Arthur Nugent, met at the foot of the stairs, both deliberately setting forth to claim their partners.

"Johnny," said young Scott, who was long-eared and a gossip, "do you wish you were Arthur?"

"Not for all this—no. Shouldn't mind being him to-night, for Miss Farrant has not a single dance to give me, and I'm sure he has danced with her half-a-dozen times already."

"Yes, I know. I don't think he ought," said Scott.

"I suppose nobody cares. Miss Latimer would never—"

Scott, more cautious, made him a sign, and went on in a lower tone:

"I don't wonder at him, but it is a little too strong. Did you see them go out of the room just now?—for this waltz,

I suppose. He can do what he likes, of course, lucky beggar—but I saw Miss Latimer looking at him—"

"You did!"

"The aunt, I mean—not the niece."

"Ah! she's too sublime."

"Well, he oughtn't to do it. That sort of conspicuousness—and it's not polite to other people. Besides, it's selfish."

"Miss Farrant's engaged," said Lawson.

"I know she is, to some artist fellow. Pity he is not here to look after her."

"So it is," Captain Lawson replied heartily; and they proceeded slowly to mount the stairs.

Then a curtain moved, close to where they had been speaking. It covered one of the doors leading into the library, which had been open behind it, and very slowly, as if she had suddenly become afflicted with old age, Mrs. Nugent advanced into the hall. Her fine eyes flashed as she looked up the low flight of steps, and saw the two young officers about to turn into the ball-room. Arthur's friends! Fools! And what was he?

Mrs. Nugent's enjoyment, that evening, had certainly been less than that of anybody else. She had not yet recovered from her irritation against Arthur the day before. He had resented it, much more than he usually did, though to other people his manner had been all sweetness. But to-day again he had been cold and distant with her, and there was about him a kind of suppressed excitement, too, which gave her an additional feeling of vague uneasiness. And nobody had watched him through the evening with more than his mother's keenness. His evident attention to Maggie Farrant had at first merely surprised her a little.

After he had danced with her a second time, she snatched an opportunity and said a word of remonstrance. "No necessity to be too good-natured—the girl has plenty of her own sort of people." He hardly answered, but she just caught, "Poppy asked me to dance with her." Then, as nobody knew better than his mother—though she was wrong in thinking herself the only person who knew—as the ball went on, though Arthur had to dance with other people, though he danced of course with Poppy now and then, it was all an impatient, hurried affair till he was free to find himself by Maggie's side again. And the look with which she received him! This was nothing new, evidently; but to Mrs. Nugent it was an extreme

surprise and displeasure. That Arthur should flirt so unblushingly within the walls of Bryans Court itself; that this third-rate girl should be on such terms with him—and yet that neither Poppy nor any one else should see what was going on!

Mrs. Nugent had the greatest difficulty in restraining herself, in being agreeable to the other guests and keeping a calm countenance. She would willingly have turned Maggie out of the Court into the snow, and sent Arthur to his room like a naughty child. But she had sufficient self-command to know that her son's salvation, in a worldly point of view, depended on her management of the situation. She blessed the stupidity of Poppy, of everybody who saw nothing. She had no idea that the state of things had forcibly struck any one but herself, who knew Arthur so well and could read his real feelings, till she paused inside that curtained door, hearing the two young men's voices, and made out that even they, with their small amount of wisdom, were blaming him.

"Arthur is mad," she said to herself. "Has he deceived me all this time? What am I to do?"

She found no answer to this question. She walked deliberately upstairs and in at the door of the ball-room. It was not quite so full now, and she could plainly see the couples who were dancing to the swing of the most musical of waltzes. Arthur and Maggie were not among them.

At the other end of the room Mrs. Nugent saw Poppy dancing again with Lord Stanbury.

"There would have been a match for her!" thought Arthur's mother with a pang of real remorse.

She sat down near the door, for her strength seemed to fail. Her face was flushed with anger and perplexity. What, she asked herself, was to be done with a young man who had so evidently taken leave of his senses? She tried to think, to decide what she had better do.

After a few moments, to her great relief, she saw Otto with a group of people a little way off. He looked round, and a slight sign brought him instantly to her side. She felt that this terrible annoyance could not be borne quite alone, and that Otto, of course, was the person to be confided in.

"Do you want anything, mother?" he said, looking at her anxiously.

Mrs. Nugent was very handsome that

evening, in velvet and beautiful old lace, but she had not her usual agreeable calmness. Arthur's prank the day before had tried her patience a good deal. Otto knew that, and now he saw, as he watched her colour change and her hands tremble, that something more and worse was on her mind. He guessed instantly what it was.

"Don't let anybody hear," she said, glancing nervously round as she spoke to him. "Where is your brother?"

"I don't see him——"

"Nor do I," she said impatiently. "But I want to know where he is. What is he doing, Otto? I have been watching him to-night with—with absolute astonishment. He has forgotten himself in the most extraordinary way. Have you noticed? Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes; I know what you mean. It's nothing very new, you know, mother. Certainly to-night he seems rather crazy on the subject. But I don't think he is fool enough to cut his own throat."

"Good heavens! And may I ask how long this has been going on? And you in his confidence! And does the whole county talk as I heard Mr. Scott and Captain Lawson talking just now? And only I, and that poor Poppy and her people, to be ignorant! Tell me at once all you know, and how long this has been going on. You will bear me witness, Otto, that I always disliked that girl!"

"I don't think it is altogether the girl's fault——"

"Nonsense, it is always a woman's fault! And in this case, with all Poppy's extraordinary kindness—which I always thought ridiculous—I call it scandalous. Arthur is an idiot, but she——"

"Look here," said Otto, "I think you are rather needlessly disturbed, you know. I don't believe the county talks at all. Lawson and Scott are not worth considering. Nobody actually knows anything, except Alice and myself."

"But tell me how long——"

"Suppose we go down into the library for a few minutes. We may come across Arthur, and a word from you might keep him in order for the rest of the evening. And I can't tell you in public, like this."

Mrs. Nugent was ready to go with him. As they went downstairs, he tried to say all the calming and pacifying things he could think of, having no wish for a scene, and being uncomfortably conscious that in her present mood his mother was almost capable of making one.

They went into the library by the curtained door near the foot of the stairs. In the large, shadowy room, its walls lined with bookcases, there was only the soft light of the fire and one lamp. A great screen stretched across between the fire and the door, and behind that screen was a square nest of warmth and comfort, Mr. Cantillon's favourite spot in the whole house, and the scene of many happy talks, in the last few weeks, between him and Miss Fanny Latimer. Otto thought of the large sofa there as a good place for his mother to rest in, while he gave her his own views on Arthur's foolish behaviour.

But as they stepped in upon the soft carpet, he suddenly turned to her and made a sign of silence. For a moment or two they stood together, breathless, inside the door, which not being really shut, had opened itself noiselessly.

There were voices talking inside the screen.

"I tell you," said Arthur—the rash young man did not even trouble himself to speak in a whisper—"if you will go away with me to-night, I'll marry you to-morrow."

"Do you know that you are very wicked?" said a soft, sweet voice in answer.

Mrs. Nugent had started when Arthur spoke, and turned a white face to Otto. He caught her hand and held it fast.

"One minute," he breathed in her ear.

"I dare say—but who makes me so? Maggie, I love you so that I shall go mad, and you won't even look or listen."

"I've looked and listened enough," the girl said. "And we have had one happy evening, though we both deserve to be miserable. It's over now—and if you can't talk sense, please order the fly and let me go home."

"I can't let you go—I can't. You belong to me."

"I do not belong to you—and you must let me go—Arthur."

Mrs. Nugent could bear this no longer, and even Otto felt his face burn. He was ashamed of listening, treasonous and unauthorised as this unhappy love-making might be. When his mother snatched her hand from his and moved quickly forward, he would have escaped through the door behind him, but for the fear of leaving her alone with those two. She

might say or do something which would make the mischief irreparable.

Instead of escaping, therefore, Otto with great presence of mind flung a chair against a table; and thus, when Mrs. Nugent arrived at the other side of the screen, Arthur and Maggie were standing up side by side facing her.

That was an awful moment, for Mrs. Nugent could not speak; she only stood and stared at them.

After the first instant of waiting, Arthur made a movement to put his arm round Maggie and draw her close to him. But she would not allow this.

"I am going," she said under her breath; and without looking at either the mother or son she walked quickly out past Otto, who gazed at her rather helplessly.

He had never imagined that a girl like Maggie could look so splendidly beautiful.

Her hand was on the door, but she turned round and beckoned to him. He followed her into the hall.

"Would you be so good as to find somebody and order my fly, Mr. Nugent?" she said, with a curious little air of dignity. "And don't think too much about that. It's nothing. He will forget, you know. I will never see him again, if I can help it. Don't spoil anybody's happiness because of me."

Otto could not speak. Somehow, though the girl's manner and words, and the white desperation of her face, were a little theatrical, he could not help admiring her. He thought she was probably sincere, and that his fool of a brother was most to blame for the whole unfortunate business. But he also thought, at that moment, that Arthur had succeeded in ruining his own prospects. It really did not seem as if he could marry Porphyria Latimer now.

Otto behaved kindly and well. He did not go back to look for his mother till he had seen Miss Farrant safely off home, and wished her good night with the politeness due to Poppy's friend. He even composed a speech for Poppy, to explain that Miss Farrant was anxious about her grandfather, and had therefore thought it best to leave directly after supper, without coming back to the ball-room.

Then, strolling back to the library with his cool and superior air, Otto wished for Alice, and wondered what she would say.

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